GUIDE TO THE FP13 MBUNDU FILE

/The Mbundu or as they are called by some sources in this file the Ovimbundu, occupy the Benguela Highland of west central Angola (Portuguese West Africa). They are also known in the literature as Nano (Banano, Vakuanan, Vakonano, Vanano or Munano), and Ovimbali (Mbari, Mambari, Mbali). They are Bantu-speakers, the language being called Umbundu--which is also used adjectively to refer to the culture--and is associated with Ambo, Herero and kindred languages. According to Childs the Mbundu are sub-divided into thirteen politically independent kingdoms each with their own paramount chief and separate governments, in addition to nine kingdoms which are generally tributory but not integral parts of the kingdom to which they owe allegiance. (McCulloch lumps all of these together and speaks of twenty-two chiefdoms.) The kingdoms/chiefdoms were in turn made up of a number of sub-chiefdoms called atumbu, for example, Bailundu the largest of the kingdoms was divided into about two hundred sub-chiefdoms.

The file consists of six sources, all in English, with sources 1:Childs, 2:McCulloch and 3:Hambly being the primary sources in the file for an over-all view of Mbundu culture and society. 1:Childs, written by a missionary, contains much ethnographic information on the identification of the Mbundu (and their neighbors), their territorial hierarchy and spatial distribution, culture history, and social structure (in terms of child training, education and kinship), but deals superficially with technology and economics. 2:McCulloch, which is basically a synthesis of 1:Childs and 3:Hambly, in conjunction with personal assistance from Childs, C. M. N. White and J. A. Barnes, presents, in somewhat outline form, a concise, critical and accurate account of the Mbundu people. His sections on social organization and political structure are

especially good since they deal critically with the somewhat contradictory data of the principal sources on the Mbundu and point out problems in analysis still unresolved. 3: Hambly is also a study of the general ethnography of the Mbundu, but since his primary emphasis is on historical reconstruction, several chapters in the work are dedicated to the analysis of cultural trait distribution. His sections on music, literature, the decorative arts, and ethnobotany are especially good, but his data on social structure is superficial. 4:Dorsey deals with the role of the "Ocimbanda" or witch doctor. This source also contains information on the poison ordeal as a means of establishing guilt or innocence in cases where accusations of witchcraft have been made. 5:Hambly discusses the relation between spiritual belief, magical acts and various occupations of the Mbundu. Also contained in this source is information on food, handicrafts, medical and magical practices, children's activities, and division of labor. The last source in the file, 6:Edwards is a cultural-functional analysis of the mechanisms of social continuity and social change observed among the Mbundu from the aboriginal period (as reconstructed by the author) to the present day.

Chiefdoms (kingdoms according to Childs) or sub-chiefdoms, the major political subdivisions of the Mbundu state have been marked for category 634 in 6:Edwards, while in 1:Childs a few comparable and relevant pages were marked for category 635, a seemingly inappropriate discrepancy in marking nearly identical data. In the other sources of the file chiefdoms (kingdoms) were not differentiated in the marking, merely being grouped with other political units within category 631.

The file unit on Mbundu, despite the large amount of ethnographic data which it contains, is probably not a very good one for cross-cultural research chiefly because of the high degree of acculturation and

social disorganization which has taken place among the group since aboriginal times, thus producing potential if not actual variability of the file sample to such an extent that no clear-cut organization of the society into neat cultural units necessary for cross-cultural research, is possible./

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